KING FORNÉS STEWART

DANGER STREET

DC BLACK LABEL

GREEN TEAM BUILDING

BOOK 9 • DOCTOR FATE

FORNES

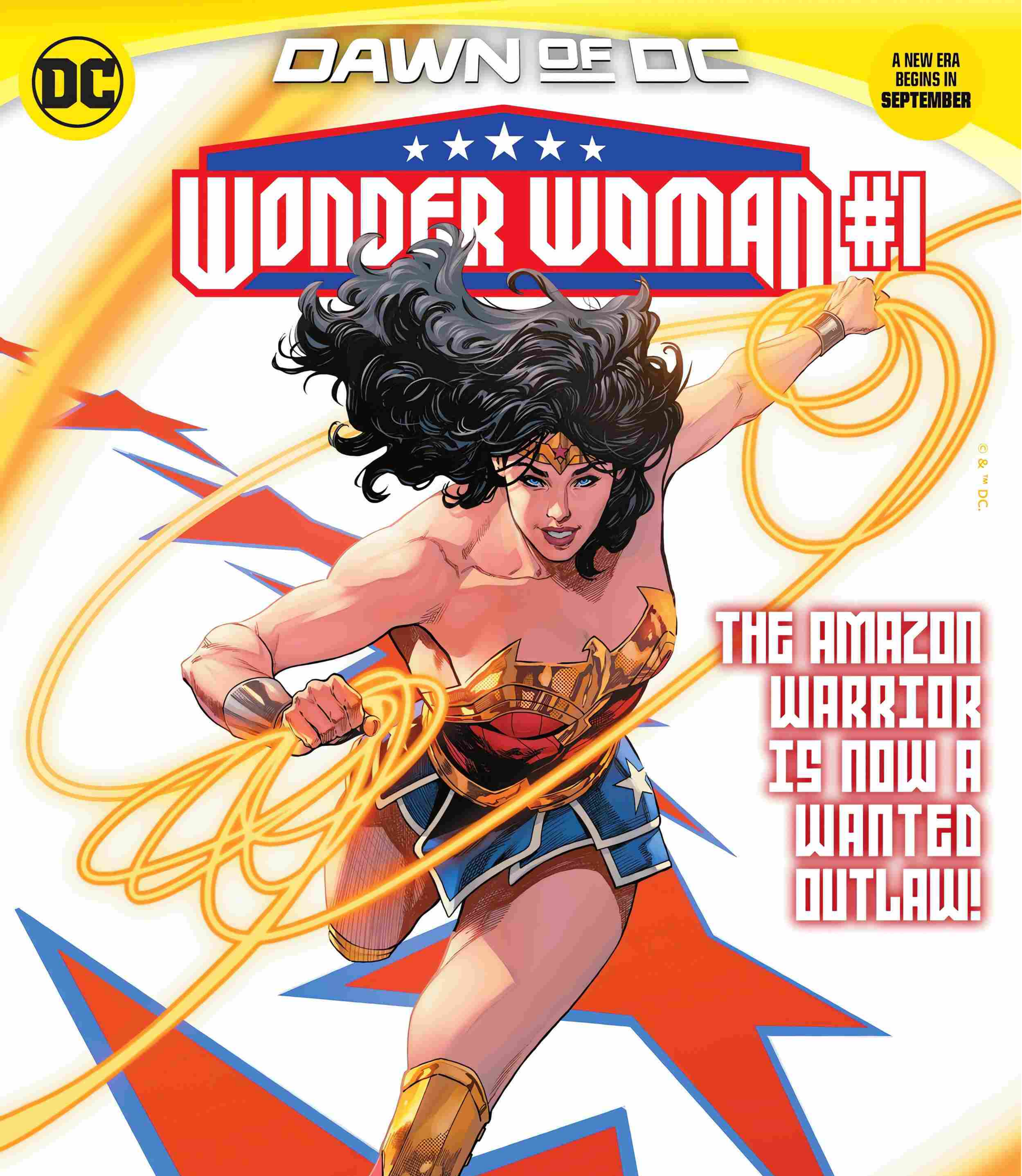
17+ MATURE

DC

DAWN OF DC

A NEW ERA BEGINS IN SEPTEMBER

WONDER WOMAN #1



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THE AMAZON WARRIOR IS NOW A WANTED OUTLAW!

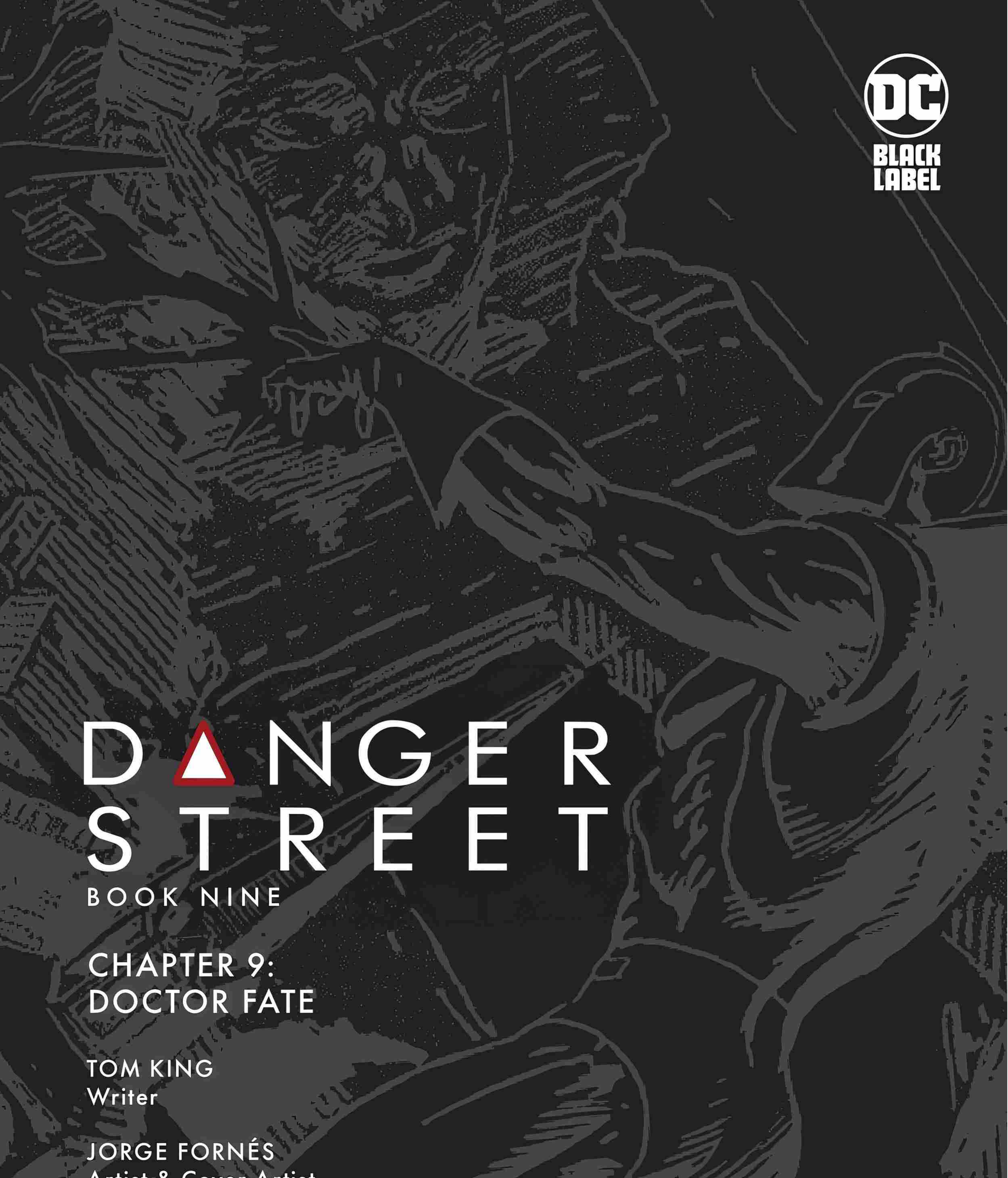
WRITTEN BY EISNER AWARD WINNER

TOM KING

ART AND COVER BY *DARK CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS* SUPERSTAR

DANIEL SAMPERE

FORGING THE FUTURE ONE HERO AT A TIME



DC BLACK LABEL

DANGER STREET

BOOK NINE

CHAPTER 9: DOCTOR FATE

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WE BEGIN.

YOU KNOW...

...I HAVE AN EASIER ROAD TO TRAVEL THAN YOU.

HOW IS THAT?

WELL, THERE ARE ***THREE*** OUTCOMES AS I SEE IT.

YOU DIE. ***I*** DIE. WE ***BOTH*** DIE. SIMPLE ENOUGH.

DO YOU DISAGREE?

NO.

YOUR GOAL HERE IS THE DEATH OF THE COMMODORE, WHICH REQUIRES BOTH MY DEATH AND YOUR LIFE.

THIS IS ONLY ACHIEVED IN ***ONE*** OF THE THREE OUTCOMES.

MY GOAL, HOWEVER, IS ONLY THE DEATH OF YOU, WHICH INCLUDES NO REQUIREMENT FOR MY OWN WELL-BEING.

THIS IS ACHIEVED IN ***TWO*** OF THE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES.

I SEE.

ISN'T IT INTERESTING?

I WON'T SAY IT IS *WITHOUT* INTRIGUE.

THERE *IS* A FLAW TO IT, THOUGH.

IS THERE?

YOUR NEED TO ACHIEVE MY DEATH LIES, I *ASSUME,* IN YOUR NEED TO PROVE YOURSELF SOMEHOW *SUPERIOR* TO ME.

YES, I SUPPOSE.

IF *THIS* IS THE CASE, HOW CAN SUCH A SEEMINGLY PERSISTENT *ITCH* BE SCRATCHED UNDER THE *VERY* TERMS YOU OUTLINE?

I ASSURE YOU, WATCHING YOU *DIE* WILL BE QUITE SATISFYING.

BUT IF *YOU* HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OF WINNING IN A TIE, AND I DO NOT...

...HOW DOES THIS *UNBALANCED* FIGHT IN *ANY* WAY DEMONSTRATE YOUR PUISSANCE?

COME NOW, DO YOU *NOT* SEE THE DILEMMA? YOU *MUST.*

AH, YES.

THAT.

SO YOU ***AGREE.*** A TIE YIELDS YOU NO TRUE VICTORY, AND ONE OF US MUST WALK AWAY, OR ELSE OUR WHOLE DONNYBROOK IS BUT A ***FARCE.***

NO, I DO NOT ADMIT THAT IN ANY FASHION.

OH?

EACH OF US HAS A ***MOTIVATION.*** A GRAIL AFTER WHICH WE ARE ***COMPELLED*** TO QUEST.

MINE IS YOUR DEATH. ***YOURS*** IS THE COMMODORE'S.

IS THIS SOMEHOW CONTROVERSIAL?

NOT AT ALL.

IF IT WERE POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO KILL THE COMMODORE ***WITHOUT*** KILLING ME, YOU WOULD BE FINISHED, THE GREEN TEAM GONE.

MY DEATH IS MEANINGLESS TO YOU.

IT IS ONLY BECAUSE I SET THE TERMS OF THE FIGHT THAT YOU EVEN CONCERN YOURSELF WITH THE SPILLING OF MY BLOOD.

BECAUSE YOU HAVE MADE THE RULES OF THE GAME, IT IS THEN ***FINE*** TO CONSIDER THEM FAVORABLE TO YOU?

SETTING THE TERMS IS NOT A FORM OF ***CHEATING*** IN ANY WAY THAT I UNDERSTAND THE WORD.

THAT BESTING ME, THEN, IN AN ***UNFAIR*** BATTLE DEMONSTRATES YOUR WORTH SOMEHOW?

IT'S ABSURD ON ITS FACE. CHEATING HAS ***NEVER*** EQUALED WINNING.

NO, IT IS EVIDENCE OF ***DOMINATION.***

AND THEREFORE, FALLS ***FAIRLY*** AND ***RIGHTEOUSLY*** INSIDE THE PARAMETERS OF OUR COMPETITION.

WHAM

YOUR ARGUMENT HERE IS CONSTRUCTED ON A ***NUMBER*** OF ASSERTIONS I AM EXPECTED, I ASSUME TACITLY, TO CONCEDE.

SUCH EXPECTATIONS, HOWEVER, MAY NOT BE MET. AND ASSERTIONS BECOME PRESUMPTIONS AS QUICKLY AS PRESUMPTIONS BECOME WISHES.

AND WHAT ARE ***WISHES*** TO ONES SUCH AS YOU AND I BESIDES SOAP BUBBLES, BLOWN ONLY TO BURST?

I HAVE ***NO*** EXPECTATIONS BEYOND AN ENGAGEMENT IN RATIONALITY.

IF YOU ARE TO REJECT THAT ONE DEMAND, THEN WHY BOTHER WITH ***CONVERSING*** AT ALL?

LET US THEN ***GRUNT*** OURSELVES INTO OUR MURDEROUS CLIMAX AND LEAVE IT AT THAT.

RATIONALITY CANNOT BE DEFINED BY ONLY ***ONE*** PERSPECTIVE-- IN THIS CASE, YOURS.

THE VERY NATURE OF THE BEAST IS FOR IT TO BE ***TESTED*** IN AN OPEN ENVIRONMENT BY ANY MAN WILLING TO STEP INTO ITS CAGE.

I AM, AND ***FOREVER*** WILL BE, SUCH A MAN.

THAT'S A RIDICULOUS CLAIM, AND ON ITS FACE SELF-DEFEATING.

IF RATIONALITY EXISTS, IT EXISTS APART FROM ANY TRIAL BY ANY MAN. IT IS ***A PRIORI.*** IT IS TRUE IN AND OF ITSELF.

IF THIS IS ***NOT*** THE CASE, WHY SHOULD ***ANYTHING*** YOU SAY TO CONTRADICT IT BE CONSIDERED SERIOUSLY? FOR YOU ARE RELYING UPON IT ***FOR*** YOUR CONTRADICTION.

JUST BECAUSE SOMETHING EXISTS BEYOND THE BOUNDS OF YOUR EXPERIENCE DOES NOT MEAN IT CANNOT BE DISCOVERED.

I AM NOT QUESTIONING SO MUCH THE CORE OF THE CLAIM AS YOUR ***APPROACH*** TO IT.

THAT APPROACH, THAT ***UNDERSTANDING,*** IS WORTHY OF MY OR ANYONE'S EXPLORATION.

WE TALK AT EACH OTHER AND ***TO*** EACH OTHER, THEN?

WE AGREE AND DISAGREE, AND THE ***WORDS*** STAY THE SAME.

IT IS AN ODD PREFACE TO ***DEATH.***

NO ONE'S DEATH IS NECESSARILY ASSURED HERE, BESIDES THAT OF YOUR MASTER, THE GREAT AND RICH ***COMMODORE.***

TO AVOID YOUR ***OWN*** FATE, YOU MIGHT GIVE WAY, AND ALLOW MY SWORD TO SINK INTO HIS CHEST RATHER THAN YOURS.

I MIGHT.

MY UNDERSTANDING IS YOU TRADITIONALLY ARE A ***HIRED*** HAND.

LET ME HIRE YOU.

HE HAS ***BILLIONS.***

WHAT DO ***YOU*** HAVE?

WHY, I HAVE YOUR ***LIFE*** ON MY BLADE.

WHAT USE WILL DOLLARS BE INSIDE THE GRAVE?

WILL YOU BRIBE THE ***WORMS*** TO SPARE YOUR FLESH?

THERE IS SUCH A THING AS ***INHERITANCE.*** A MAN'S WORTH CAN GO BEYOND A HEARTBEAT.

A ***FAMILY*** CAN CARRY BOTH HIS COIN AND NAME TO TRIUMPH.

AS ONE EXAMPLE.

FROM OUR ***BIRTH,*** WE TRAINED FOR ANOTHER'S DEATH.

MORNING TO EVENING, EVENING TO MORNING, YEAR AFTER YEAR AFTER YEAR.

MEN LIKE ***YOU*** AND ***I***--WE DO NOT HAVE ***FAMILY.***

NO.

WE DO NOT.

I SUPPOSE, THEN, YOU WILL FALL BACK ON THE *ILLUSION* OF REPUTATION.

"A MAN IS NOT GONE WHO IS NOT FORGOTTEN."

AND ALL OF THAT OVERWROUGHT *NONSENSE.*

I ABANDONED FAITH IN AN *AFTERLIFE* WHEN I KILLED MY TENTH AND ELEVENTH. A WOMAN AND HER DEAR CHILD.

AT THAT POINT I KNEW ONLY *PERDITION* AWAITED ME, AND I SAW NO REASON TO GRANT IT POWER OVER ME IN LIFE THAT IT WOULD SURELY HOLD IN ABUNDANCE IN DEATH.

BETTER TO ANTICIPATE THE VOID AND BE SHOCKED BY HELLFIRE THAN TO WHILE AWAY THE DAYS *DREADING* JUDGMENT.

SO YOU THINK REPUTATION IS *USELESS* IF IT GOES UNOBSERVED?

DO WE NOT LIVE *IGNORANT* OF MOST OF THE WORLD NOW? DO YOU DISMISS *ALL* THAT DOESN'T FALL WITHIN YOUR FIVE SENSES AT ANY PARTICULAR MOMENT?

I DO NOT CARE FOR SONGS I DO NOT *HEAR.*

WHETHER THEY SPEAK ILL OR KINDLY OF ME AFTER I AM GONE IS NO *CONCERN* OF MINE.

THEN YOUR TALK OF A *DRAW* IS AS NONSENSICAL NOW AS WHEN FIRST UTTERED.

IF *YOU* DIE AND *I* DIE, AND YOU CARE NOT FOR WHAT COMES NEXT, HOW CAN YOU THEN CLAIM *ANY* VICTORY AT ALL?

THERE WILL BE NO *CELEBRATION* IN IT FOR YOU.

I WILL NOT KILL YOU FOR WHAT *OTHERS* MAY SAY ABOUT ME AFTERWARD.

I AM NOT SOME *NARCISSIST* WHO DEMANDS THE DANCE OF MAIDENS AT HIS EVERY HUM.

YOU DIE TODAY FOR *ME* ALONE.

YOU DO NOT SOUND LIKE ONE ANTICIPATING A *VOID.*

PERHAPS YOU DO NOT KNOW YOUR *OWN* BELIEFS.

I KNOW MYSELF WELL *ENOUGH* TO KNOW I BELIEVE IN ONE THING.

AND *ONLY* THIS--

I *WILL* WIN.

THE MATCH IS *EVEN.*

INDEED.

THERE IS A *GREAT* DEAL OF FIGHT AHEAD OF US--OF THAT I HAVE LITTLE DOUBT.

BUT I DO NOT PERCEIVE THE *NECESSITY* OF IT IN THIS MOMENT, GIVEN THAT SO MANY SUBSEQUENT MOMENTS WILL BE LOST TO ITS FURY.

A *RESPITE* NOW WILL DO US BOTH GOOD.

A PARLEY?

YOU HAVE ALREADY EXPRESSED *EXASPERATION* AS TO MY DEFINITION OF CHEATING.

DO YOU NOT FEAR A PREMATURE VIOLATION OF ANY *TEMPORARILY* GRANTED PEACE?

I FEAR *NOTHING* ABOUT YOU.

CLANK!

YOUR LIES HAVE SOME *BITE* IN THEM.

I APPRECIATE THAT.

I AM GOING TO SIT ON THE LEDGE AND LOOK AT THE VIEW.

YOU ARE *WELCOME* TO JOIN ME.

YOUR WELCOME IS AS UNWELCOME AS IT IS UNREQUIRED.

CLANK!

IF I'M EVER IN *NEW YORK,* IT'S FOR BUSINESS.

I DON'T *SEE* MUCH MORE THAN THE AIRPORT AND A HEAD BURSTING OPEN.

I WAS BORN HERE.

IT ALL JUST LOOKS LIKE THE *BACKGROUND* TO OTHER, MORE IMPERATIVE EVENTS.

I'M FROM L.A., THOUGH I WAS BORN AN HOUR SOUTH IN *SANTA ANA,* ORANGE COUNTY.

MOVED UP THERE WHEN I WAS *EIGHT.* THERE WERE A LOT OF JOBS IN L.A. I WAS YOUNG. I GOT TIRED OF THE COMMUTE.

TOO MUCH TRAFFIC. NOT THAT I COULD *DRIVE.*

DID THEY HAVE YOU DOING GUN JOBS THAT YOUNG, OR ALL POISON?

POISON *EXCLUSIVELY.*

YOU KNOW HOW IT IS. *NO ONE* SEES THE KID AT THE COCKTAIL HOUR.

I DIDN'T GO TO GUNS UNTIL I WAS AT LEAST TWELVE, AND I HAD TO DO KNIVES *BEFORE* THAT.

IF THE WHOLE POINT OF IT WAS *THIS,* THESE GREEN TEAM BOYS YOU'RE SLAUGHTERING ONE AFTER ANOTHER...

...IF YOUR *CULT* WAS BUILDING TO THAT THROUGH *THOUSANDS* OF YEARS, AS YOU CLAIM...

...WHO WERE THESE PEOPLE YOU *MURDERED* BACK THEN?

...AH, YOU KNOW HOW IT IS. YOUR *FIRST* FEW DOZEN CAN'T BE THE BEST. THEY WERE JUST...

...PRACTICE.

ALL FOR *THIS,* THIS MOMENT HERE.

AH.

I BROUGHT SOME *WHISKEY.*

WE MIGHT SHARE.

YOU HAD A *BOTTLE* IN YOUR BOOT?

I SENSED *SOMETHING* WAS OFF IN YOUR BALANCE.

I'VE HAD IT THERE SINCE I WAS *TEN.* HELPS WITH THE NERVES.

THIS LATE IN THE GAME, MY BALANCE WOULD BE OFF *WITHOUT* IT.

YOUR INCLINATION TOWARD THE *PREPOSTEROUS* IS GRATING.

YOU'RE NOT *NERVOUS.*

YOU SEE IT ALL, THEN? THAT'S *YOUR* PROPOSITION?

TALK ABOUT A *PREPOSTEROUS* FRAMING.

YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW I HAD *BOOZE* ON ME.

OUR OCCUPATION IS UNFORGIVING OF *ANY* HESITATION.

I'M SURE YOU HAVE SEEN AS MANY COLLEAGUES AS I HAVE FALL NOT THROUGH ACTION BUT THROUGH PARALYSIS, A PAUSE WHEN MOVEMENT WAS *REQUIRED.*

A MENTAL DEFICIENCY WOULD HAVE *LONG* AGO BURIED YOU WITH SO MANY OTHERS.

PERSONALLY, I'VE SEEN MORE DIE THROUGH MISPERCEIVED *OMNIPOTENCE* THAN FAULTY REACTION TIME.

SO MANY WHO BELIEVED THEY WERE *STRONG* WHEN THEY WERE SO VERY WEAK.

I'M NOT *DEFICIENT,* I'M *REALISTIC.*

YOU SPEAK LIKE AN *AMATEUR,* AND YOU FIGHT LIKE A *PROFESSIONAL.*

WHY BOTHER FIBBING WHEN YOU GIVE YOURSELF SO *QUICKLY* AWAY?

PROBABLY SO YOU'D ASK *THAT* QUESTION.

EVERYTHING IS A TEST. EVERYTHING IS *PRACTICE.*

EXCEPT, MAYBE, *THIS.*

MM.

I WAS *FIVE* WHEN I HAD MY FIRST KILL.

IT WAS A RIFLE. FROM TWO HUNDRED YARDS OUT. I WAS NOT NERVOUS THEN, NOR AM I *NOW.*

NOW YOU CAN ASK WHY I SHARED *THAT.*

I HAVE AN *IDEA.* ALMOST AN EPIPHANY.

WHAT IF WE *FLIP* FOR IT?

AM I SUPPOSED TO COMPREHEND THAT FOPPERY?

OR JUST PRETEND TO?

I HAVE A *COIN* HERE. *GOLD.* WORTH A FEW THOUSAND.

HEADS, I JUMP. *TAILS,* YOU DO.

WE END IT RIGHT HERE AND SKIP ALL THE CARVING AND CUTTING.

I'M NOT HERE FOR *GAMBLING.*

NEITHER ARE *YOU.*

WE *BOTH* UNDERSTAND WHAT THE OTHER IS. WHOEVER KILLS WHOMEVER FIRST IS NOT A MATTER OF *SKILL* AT THIS POINT.

IT WILL SIMPLY BE *CHANCE.* COMPLICATED CHANCE. THE PHYSICS IN A TURN OF A SWORD, ATOMS COLLIDING, BUT *CHANCE* NONETHELESS.

WE'RE *BOTH* ONLY INTERESTED IN THE AFTER-PARTY. WHY NOT FORGO THE PERFORMANCE AND GET TO THE CURTAIN CALL?

AGAIN WITH QUESTIONS YOU KNOW THE ANSWER TO. *AGAIN* IT IS GRATING.

A *COIN* IN THE AIR.

IT'S NOT QUITE *FAIR,* IS IT?

WE'RE **BACK** TO YOUR "*WINNING BY TYING*" SCENARIO, THEN?

YOU **STILL** EXPECT ME TO UNDERSTAND THAT?

I HAVE **NO** EXPECTATIONS OF YOU WHATSOEVER.

BUT INDEED, TO SPLIT OUR CHANCES DOWN TO 50/50 WHEN I BEGIN WITH A 2/3 ADVANTAGE DOES IMPLY MY **IDIOCY** AND YOUR CUNNING.

I **DOUBT** YOU ANTICIPATED ANOTHER RESPONSE.

HEADS.

HAD YOU SAID **YES**, I'D BE DEAD. YOU'D BE SUPERIOR, SATISFIED, HAPPY.

THE EVENTUAL OUTCOME IS NOT **DENIED**. ONLY **DELAYED**.

LET'S TRY IT **AGAIN**.

JUST LET ME KNOW YOUR CALL **BEFORE** IT LANDS.

MY **ANSWER** STANDS STOUT.

I WILL **NOT** NEGOTIATE FROM A STATISTICAL POINT OF DISADVANTAGE.

THAT LUCK FAVORED ME **ONCE** HAS NO IMPACT ON WHAT IT MAY DO AGAIN.

THE FUTURE IS **FOREVER** UNSETTLED, I GRANT YOU.

EVEN CAUSE MAY ONE DAY FLEE EFFECT.

AND WHAT WILL BE **DROPPED**...WILL NO LONGER **FALL**.

TRUE. **HOWEVER**.

WHAT CAN BE DECIDED BY THE COIN WILL **BETTER** BE DECIDED BY THE SWORD.

IN THE END, I PREFER **BLOOD** TO **GOLD**.

THAT'S FANCY.

IT'S NOT *DIFFICULT.*

ANYONE MIGHT DO IT.

IT JUST TAKES... *PRACTICE.*

I ACCEPT THE *PREMISE* THAT SUCH A SKILL IS WITHIN THE MEANS OF THE COMMON MAN.

HOWEVER, I HAVE TROUBLE CONCEDING THE *EASE* OF ITS MASTERY.

I SUSPECT YOUR HUMILITY OUTWEIGHS THE *FACTS* IN THIS MATTER.

NOT IN ANY WAY.

YES, I SPENT HALF A DECADE IN *AGONY* LEARNING THE INTRICACY OF THIS METHOD, BUT DO NOT MOST LIVE IN THEIR LIVES IN PAIN AND ANXIETY?

THAT I CHOSE *THIS* ONE FORM OVER ANOTHER DOES NOT MARK ME AS BETTER, AND MY ACKNOWLEDGING *THAT* FACT CERTAINLY DOES NOT MARK ME AS HUMBLE.

IT'S A *FALSE* COMPARISON, AND SO OBVIOUSLY SO, I PRESUME YOU ARE GUILTY OF JEST MORE THAN A MISAPPRAISED SELF-WORTH.

THE VICISSITUDES OF LIFE, AS *ROUGH* AS THE INEVITABLE FALLS FROM GRACE CAN BE, ARE ON A SEPARATE PLANE FROM SUBMITTING YOURSELF TO *DAILY* TORTURE.

AND I DO NOT SPEAK HERE OUT OF CONJECTURE, HAVING SPENT MY LIFE KILLING THOSE WHO CHOSE NOT TO TRAIN.

DO YOU HAVE TO QUESTION *EVERY* ASSERTION I DARE UTTER?

MUST *EVERYTHING* BE A FIGHT?

HOW AM I TO RESPOND WITHOUT *CONTRADICTING* YOU AND THUS *AFFIRMING* YOU?

IN CASE YOUR CURIOSITY HAS BEEN STIRRED, THE *METHOD* OF THIS METHOD IS SIMPLE.

IF I CLOSE MY HAND, IF I MAKE A FIST...

...YOU *FALL.*

I, *NATURALLY*, KNEW OF YOUR ABILITIES AND WONDERED *WHEN* YOU WOULD USE THEM.

STRANGE FOR IT TO BE *NOW.*

BECAUSE WE ARE AT *PARLEY?*

OR BECAUSE A PLAYING FIELD HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED, AND YOU ASSUMED *THAT* WAS WHERE MY DOMINANCE MUST PLAY OUT?

NO, I--WRONGLY--PRESUMED YOU WOULD WAIT UNTIL A *CLIMACTIC* MOMENT, SOMETHING WHERE OUR SWORDS WERE AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS.

AND I'D GET THE UPPER HAND--I AM OVER-CONFIDENT IN MY PRESUMPTIONS, I ADMIT--AND I WOULD *THRUST* MY SWORD INTO YOU.

AT THAT MOMENT, YOU WOULD BREAK WHATEVER RESTRAINT YOU HAD AND USE *THIS* TALENT TO PUSH *YOUR* SWORD INTO *ME.*

SO YOU *ANTICIPATED* MY CHEATING? I'M OFFENDED, APPALLED, AND, IN ALL HONESTY, MORE THAN MILDLY INTERESTED.

DID YOU HAVE A *PLAN,* THEN, FOR WHAT YOU MIGHT DO IN THIS CIRCUMSTANCE?

OBVIOUSLY. AND NOT A *SURPRISING* ONE.

I MEAN, CLASSICALLY, ONE USES THE *STRENGTH* OF ONE'S ENEMY TO BEGET HIS *WEAKNESS.*

I'M *SURE* YOU'D AGREE.

IF WE'RE SPEAKING *CLASSICALLY,* THEN YES.

CERTAINLY.

IF I KNEW YOU WOULD EVENTUALLY RELY ON THIS *CRUTCH,* YOU CERTAINLY KNEW THIS AS WELL--CONSCIOUSLY OR EVEN PERHAPS UNCONSCIOUSLY.

AS SUCH, *SOME* OF YOUR EFFORT IN THE TRADITIONAL BATTLE WOULD BE SPARED IN PREPARATION FOR THIS FINAL BURST.

SEEING AS WE ARE EVENLY MATCHED, THIS LESSENING OF YOUR INTENSITY, HOWEVER SLIGHT, WOULD BE MY *KEY* TO VICTORY.

IS *THAT* WHY YOU AGREED TO THIS FIGHT?

WE WERE EVENLY MATCHED, A TIE IS A WIN FOR ME, YOU'RE AT A DISADVANTAGE, YET YOU KNEW I'D *CHEAT* AND, IN *RELYING* ON THE CHEAT, I'D *LOSE.*

YOU ARE *VERY* CLEVER. I *LIKE* YOU.

THANK YOU.

I LIKE YOU TOO.

BUT I MUST INQUIRE, ***REGARDLESS*** OF ANY MUTUAL ADMIRATION, AM I TO BE MERELY ***DROPPED?***

MERELY? YOU IMPLY THAT IF I DEFY THE TERMS OF THE FIGHT, ***YOU*** WIN.

THE SOLUTION, THEN, IS TO ENGAGE YOU IN A ***FAIR*** FIGHT, WHERE A TIE GOES TO ME.

AM I UNDERSTANDING YOUR ARGUMENT HERE? HAVE I LEFT OUT ANY ***SUBTLETIES?***

WELL.

I ***MIGHT*** BE LYING. WHEN LEFT WITH NOTHING, ***BLUFF.***

I DON'T KNOW HOW ***SUBTLE*** THAT IS, ESPECIALLY NOW THAT IT IS ***ADMITTED,*** BUT IT IS HARD TO IGNORE NONETHELESS.

INDEED.

HUH.

IN TRUTH, THAT IS ***NOT*** HOW I THOUGHT THIS WOULD END.

CONSCIOUSLY OR UNCONSCIOUSLY.

ALL THAT TALK OF A TIE, AND I WIN ***OUTRIGHT.***

WHAT A ***TRAGIC*** WASTE OF TIME.

COMMODORE.

I HAVE AN UPDATE.

ABOUT #≈ξ%∞#@ TIME, MAN. I'M SOOOOO BORED. @%#ɨΠ ꟻΠΣ≈ƒ.

I WANT TO GO OUT AND GET SOMETHING TO EAT. I DON'T LIKE WHAT THEY HAVE HERE. I HAD IT YESTERDAY.

THERE'S A NEW PLACE DOWNTOWN WITH ALL SORTS OF SAUCES FOR YOUR FRIES. LIKE THE KIND YOU GET IN EUROPE. YOU BEEN THERE?

WHAT DO YOU THINK? FRIES AND SAUCES?

HELLO? ASSASSIN DUDE?

HELLO? ARE YOU THERE?

DID I #≈ξ%∞#@ LOSE YOU?

FOOSH!

NO, I'M *HERE.*

NO ONE IS...

...LOST.

WHAT THE Ø$%ʃ IS IT?! YOU THINK I HAVE ALL DAY FOR THIS #@%#@?! DID YOU #≈£%∞#@ WIN OR WHAT?!

I HAVE A #≈£%∞#@ MULTIBILLION-DOLLAR EMPIRE TO LEAD, AND I WANT SOME #≈£%∞#@ FRIES WITH ALL THE #≈£%∞#@ SAUCE IN THE WORLD!

I'M TIRED OF #≈£%∞#@ KETCHUP!

IT SHOULDN'T BE TOO MUCH LONGER.

I JUST WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW WE'VE BEEN *ENGAGED* FOR SOME TIME.

AND NOW WE ARE NEAR THE END.

JESUS CHRIST, YOU'RE CALLING ME FOR THAT @#!$?!

@#!$, CALL ME WHEN SOMEONE'S #≈£%∞#@ DEAD!

EVERYTHING ELSE IS JUST A #≈£%∞#@ TEASE!

CALL IT.

TAILS.

DO YOU EVER WONDER... WE COULD'VE QUIT, SURRENDERED, JOINED THE OTHER SEVEN BILLION PEOPLE WHO ***DON'T*** CARVE OFF LIMBS AFTER A GOOD DAY.

BUT WE KEPT GOING, KEPT KILLING AND KILLING AND ***KILLING.*** WADING INTO AN OCEAN OF BLOOD, LETTING THE WAVES CRASH OVER OUR HEADS.

DO YOU EVER WONDER ***WHY?***

YOU EITHER ***HUNT*** OR YOU ARE ***HUNTED.***

NOT THE ***CLICHÉ*** SOME WELL-WORSHIPPED FATHER FIGURE YELLED AT YOU AS HE WHIPPED AND PRODDED YOU TO BE A "***BETTER ASSASSIN.***"

WE ARE, MY GOD, FOR THE ***FIRST*** TIME, IN THE COMPANY OF OUR ***OWN.*** I KNOW YOU SEE THAT, BECAUSE ***I*** SEE IT.

LET US DISPENSE WITH THE ***EASY*** WORDS THAT BUILD THE EASY WALLS AND SEE WHAT LIES IN THE GOTHIC HOUSE BEYOND THE GATE.

HOW'D I DO?

WHO CARES?

BACK TO THE SWORDS, THEN?

I SUPPOSE.

I'M **AWARE** THAT I AVOIDED YOUR QUESTION.

I AM **VEXED** AT YOUR WILLINGNESS NOT TO CALL OUT MY COWARDICE FOR THIS DODGE.

SURRENDER IS NOT A TRAIT I WOULD PUT ON **YOU.**

NOT SURRENDER. REGRET.

IT IS NOTHING TO HIDE AMONG YOUR INFERIORS. THEY **FANTASIZE** ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE AND YOU LET THEM KEEP THEIR DREAMS.

WHEN CONFRONTED WITH AN **EQUAL,** ONE NECESSARILY FEELS EXPOSED.

YOU CALL US **EQUALS** OUT OF MOCKERY.

MOMENTS AGO, I WAS AT **YOUR** MERCY.

THERE IS NO **EQUALITY** HERE.

YOU **MOCK** ME WITH SUCH FRAUDULENT INNOCENCE.

YOU **SURVIVED** AND THE FIGHT CONTINUES.

IF ALL THAT SEPARATED YOU FROM DEATH WAS MY **MERCY,** YOU WOULD NOW BE NOTHING BUT GUTS IN THE GRAVEL.

FOR I HAVE **NONE.**

YOU **UNDERESTIMATE** YOURSELF.

OR.

PERHAPS.

I **PROPERLY** ESTIMATE YOU.

I DOUBT THAT *VERY* MUCH.

YOU--

SHWWK

NOW, WAS THAT *CHEATING?* SHOULD I HAVE WAITED FOR THE PARLEY TO BE DECLARED OVER AND FOR US TO SWING AND CLASH IN THE THROES OF MERRIMENT?

I AM UNCERTAIN.

THE CONTRACT BETWEEN US IS MERELY *IMPLIED,* AND ITS MERE IMPLICATIONS ESCAPE ME.

NN NNN NNNN...

YOU MUST AT *LEAST* CONCEDE THAT-- BY EGGING YOU INTO USING YOUR MAGNIFICENT POWERS IN SUCH A WAY AS TO DILUTE THEM--

--KNOWING YOU WOULD *REGRET* YOUR ADVANTAGE AND EVENTUALLY SCOOP ME UP IN ORDER TO SAVE YOUR *PRIDE*--

--THUS MAKING IT *POSSIBLE* FOR THE SWORD THROW TO HIT ITS TARGET WITHOUT YOUR *KEEN* MENTAL INTERFERENCE--

--I WAS AT LEAST SIGNALING, IF *SLYLY,* WHAT WAS TO COME.

NNN NNNN NNNN!

AND IF ONE SAYS THAT ONE IS *ABOUT* TO VIOLATE THE TERMS OF AN AGREEMENT AND NO ACTION IS TAKEN TO *PREVENT* THIS ACTION...

...CAN WE SAY THEN THAT THE TERMS *THEMSELVES* ARE FLAWED--THAT THEY CARRY NO TRUE ENFORCEMENT MECHANISM?

AND IF THEY HAVE *NO* CONSEQUENCES, NO *TEETH,* DO THEY HAVE MEANING AT ALL?

NN...NN... NNNN...

I WILL SAY, AND THIS IS NOT TRIVIAL, I ***THINK,*** IN THE END, YOU CONVINCED ME.

THOUGH YOU ***DIE*** TODAY, THERE MUST BE SOME ***COMFORT*** IN THAT.

OUR PROFESSION IS POPULATED WITH OBSTINATE ***BASTARDS,*** AND THE TWO OF US BEING AT THE TOP OF IT ONLY PROVES THAT SUCH A QUALITY ***INTENSIFIES*** WITH SUCCESS.

NNNN GNNN...

YOU DID ***INDEED*** HAVE THE ADVANTAGE. FROM THE ***MOMENT*** OUR CONFLICT BEGAN.

YOU COULD SACRIFICE ***EVERYTHING,*** AND I COULD NOT. THE HUNT REQUIRES THAT I GO ON, MUCH TO MY DISGRACE.

YOU ARE ***ENTIRELY*** RIGHT ABOUT THAT, AND I WAS ***ENTIRELY*** WRONG.

NNNN... RNNNN...

IS ***THAT*** VICTORY ENOUGH FOR YOU? I THINK IT ***SHOULD*** BE.

ANY MAN MAY LOSE A ***SWORD*** FIGHT.

NOT ***EVERY*** MAN CAN CHANGE ANOTHER'S ***MIND.***

GRNNN NNNN NNN...

YOUR MASTER ***WILL*** DIE TODAY.

ALL THE TRAINING OF YOUR LIFE, ALL THE LIVES YOU'VE ***TAKEN*** TO END UP JUST HERE.

ALL OF IT MAY SEEM LIKE IT WAS FOR ***NOTHING*** BUT YOUR OWN SLIP INTO SOLITUDE.

BUT IT'S ***NOT,*** REALLY, BECAUSE I...WELL, I AM ***PERSUADED.***

GNNN NNNN...

YOU EITHER *HUNT* OR YOU ARE *HUNTED.*

JUST BECAUSE IT IS *LEARNED* DOES NOT--

AAAAAAAAAAHH!

YOU--

CLANG!

NNNN... NNNN...

THIS IS *SILLY.*

YOU ARE *DONE.*

THIS IS BUT THE FINAL SPASM OF A BODY *ALREADY* DEAD--

AAAHHRGG!

GGNNNNN!

GGGGNNNN.

NNN... I...NNNN... NNN...

YOU THINK...
YOU THINK...THAT'S
ENOUGH?

A LEG...A
LEG...IS...NOTH...
NOTHING...

I...
NNN...I...
W...

I WILL...H-HAVE
YOUR...BOY...
TONIGHT...

YOU...YOU HAVE...
NOTHING...
YOU ARE...
NOTHING...

YOU...
HEAR
ME...

W...W...
W-WIN...

YOU EITHER
HUNT OR YOU
ARE HUNTED!

WI...NNNN...
NNNNN...I...
WI...NNNN...

HE'S DEAD!

AFTER
A THOUSAND
GENERATIONS...

...WE ARE
FULFILLED!

WIN...
NN...NNN...WIN...
NNNN...

AAAAAAAAAAHHH

SHNNKK

I! WIN!

UNNGGG!

HNNNNN.

NNNNN.

...GG...G... GNNN.

SNNNGGG.

...GOOD...

A *TIE*, THEN?

IF IT WAS OVER.

WE'RE STILL ALIVE.

ARE WE?

HM.

I'M NOT *ENTIRELY* SURE.

WOULD THERE BE A WAY TO TELL?

EVERYTHING HURTS.

THAT SUGGESTS SOME FORM OF ***TEMPORARY*** CORPOREAL RECOVERY RATHER THAN SLIPPAGE INTO THE MORE ETHEREAL REALMS.

IF YOU CARRY YOUR SOUL WITH YOU, WHY WOULD YOU ***NOT*** CARRY YOUR PAIN?

IS THE CLAIM HERE THAT A SOUL IS ENTIRELY ***DETACHED*** FROM OUR SLINGS AND ARROWS? COULD THAT DETACHED THING EVEN BE ***CALLED*** A SOUL?

IT WOULD SEEM TO ME THAT IF YOU CLAIMED ***SOME*** SEMBLANCE OF SELF IN THE AFTERLIFE, YOU MUST BRING A ***BIT*** OF WORRY WITH YOU.

SHUNK

YOU ATTEMPT THE THOUGHTS OF ***ANGELS.*** YOU MIGHT AS WELL BE AN ANT ACTING OUT *HAMLET*. "TO BE OR NOT TO BE."

IF WE ARE BEYOND OUR LIMITATIONS, I SHOULD ***NOT*** FEEL LIMITED.

CONSIDERING THE ***DAMAGE*** DONE TO YOU, AND YET THERE YOU ARE STANDING, YOU PERHAPS MISJUDGE YOUR OWN LIMITATIONS.

I, ***FRANKLY,*** AM IMPRESSED.

AND AS I AM ***NEVER*** IMPRESSED, I, AGAIN, FRANKLY, AM ***DEAD.***

WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR *SWORD* BACK?

IT'S NOT *MINE.* IT'S BORROWED.

REALLY?

FROM WHOM?

IT'S THE ARM OF A *HERO,* RESHAPED.

MADE FROM *DIAMONDS.* I SUSPECT I SPENT TOO MUCH ENERGY RESHAPING IT, GIVING YOU AN *ADVANTAGE* IN THOSE LAST MOMENTS.

BUT I BELIEVED IT WOULD CUT THROUGH ANYTHING YOU'D BRING AND WOULD BE WORTH THE LOSS. HINDSIGHT'S 20/20 AND ALL THAT.

IT WAS FOUND WITH ONE OF *YOUR* BOYS.

A FANTASTIC WEAPON. THE *WARLORD'S,* I UNDERSTAND.

I *AM* SORRY ABOUT YOUR LEG.

MY FAILURE TO PROTECT *MY* LIMBS IS NOT A PROBLEM *YOU* SHOULD HAVE TO SOLVE.

SAVE YOUR APOLOGIES FOR WHEN THEY ARE NEEDED.

HOW ABOUT *THIS,* THEN-- I'M SORRY I WON.

I WOULD WAGER THAT WOULD FULFILL *SOME* SORT OF NEED.

KNOWING YOU AND KNOWING HOW YOU KNOW ME, YOU MAY TAKE AT LEAST *SOME* COMFORT IN ITS SAYING, IF NOT ITS SINCERITY.

HAHAHA.

AND WHAT *DID* YOU WIN, EXACTLY?

YOU AGREED. IN THE END. I *HEARD* YOU.

WE BOTH FELL.

YOUR OBJECTIVE IS UNOBTAINED. AND *MINE* HAS BEEN EASILY GRASPED. THE BLUE RIBBON IS PINNED UPON *MY* LAPEL.

I GET IT, AND YET, AND FOR THIS *I* APOLOGIZE, I CAN'T HELP BUT PONDER...

...WHAT *WAS* YOUR OBJECTIVE, EXACTLY?

TO KEEP THE BOY *ALIVE.*

HUH. WELL, PERHAPS IT IS TIME I TOLD YOU, I HAVE A *MODEST* CONFESSION.

BEFORE I FOUND YOU, I FOUND *ALLIES.* I *TOLD* THEM IF I DID NOT MAKE IT, THEY WERE TO COMPLETE THE HUNT.

I LED *YOU* TO BELIEVE THE TIE WOULD GO TO YOU, SO THAT YOU WOULD LEAVE THAT GROUND UNDEFENDED AND I MIGHT MORE EASILY PLANT *MY FLAG* IN ITS SOIL.

NO...

I HAVE *TRIUMPHED.* YOU HAVE FAILED.

THE PIN IS UPON *MY* SHIRT.

THE BOY WILL DIE.

YES. YES. I *DO* SEE. HM.

BUT...

...WILL HE?

THEY ARE CAPABLE PEOPLE. THEY ARE *WELL* MOTIVATED.

YOU HAVE REASON TO *DOUBT* THEM?

TOMORROW YOU SAY THE BOY WILL BE DEAD. BUT I KNOW *NOTHING* OF TOMORROW.

IN CONTRAST, *TODAY* I UNDERSTAND, REASONABLY WELL, *THIS* MOMENT, YOU AND I HERE.

AND AS WE CONVERSE, THE BOY BREATHES AND LAUGHS. HE *LIVES.* VICTORY IS *MINE.*

A MAN WHO DID NOT SEE *MY* PLAN IS TELLING ME HE DOES NOT SEE THE FUTURE.

THE FACT THAT YOU ARE *BLIND* DOES NOT MEAN THE DARKNESS IS EMPTY.

TOMORROW WILL COME. HE *WILL* PASS. VICTORY IS MINE.

HA! I KNOW *WHY* YOU DO IT NOW, AND I WAS QUITE RIGHT.

YOUR TALK OF THE HUNT *WAS* AS MEANINGLESS AS MY TALK OF MONEY OR ANY OTHER MOTIVATION THAT PUT US HERE.

BUT *NOW* YOU HAVE GIVEN YOURSELF AWAY.

YOU HAVE SUCH *ODD* OBSESSIONS.

WHY DOES IT MATTER *WHY* A THING IS DONE AT ALL?

THERE IS *CAUSE* AND THERE IS *EFFECT*-- WHAT CONNECTS THE TWO IS PURE *FICTION.*

YOU KILL FOR THE SAME REASON *I* KILL. YOU ARE ME. I AM YOU.

AND FROM THEN ON, WE ARE *FOREVER* LOOKING TO SEE IF SOMEONE, ANYONE--IF ANYONE WILL *STOP* US.

WE DO IT THAT *FIRST* TIME. WE ARE CHILDREN AND WE SEE WHAT WE *CAN* DO, WHAT WE *WILL* DO, OVER AND OVER.

SPECULATION AND ABSURDITY.

THE *WHININGS* OF A MAN WHO HAS JUST LOST DESPERATELY SEARCHING FOR AN ANSWER AND REALIZING HE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW THE *QUESTION.*

NO, NO, NO, *I* KNOW THE QUESTION. I KNOW IT *TOO* WELL. I'VE JUST BEEN AFRAID TO ASK IT ALL THIS TIME.

I THINK I THOUGHT I WOULD *CRY,* BUT IT IS TOO LATE FOR THAT NOW, AND I HAVE *WON* AND SO HAVE *YOU,* AND SO HERE IT IS, THEN...

...HEADS OR TAILS?

TO BE CONTINUED!

DC

DAWN OF DC

A NEW ARC BEGINS THIS SEPTEMBER

Eisner Award winner for
Best Continuing Series
& Best Cover Artist

Written by
Tom Taylor

Art by
Stephen Byrne

Cover by
Bruno Redondo

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Jump on board a swashbuckling pirate adventure starring Dick Grayson!

NIGHTWING

#106

DAWN OF DC

DC NATION SPOTLIGHT ON

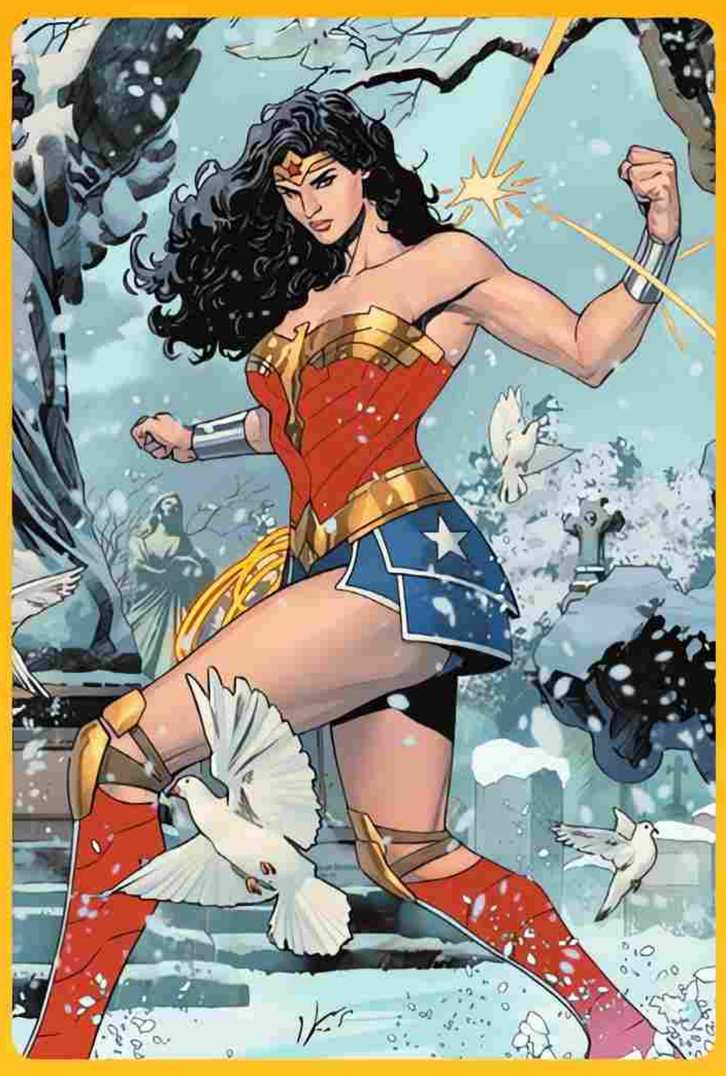
WONDER WOMAN #1

INTERVIEW WITH TOM KING

Eisner Award-winning writer Tom King (*Batman – One Bad Day: The Riddler*) and superstar artist Daniel Sampere (*Dark Crisis on Infinite Earths*) deliver a groundbreaking new take on Wonder Woman for her long-awaited Dawn of DC debut. Go behind the scenes with King in this exclusive DC Nation

WHERE DO WE FIND DIANA WHEN THE NEW *WONDER WOMAN* SERIES BEGINS?

She's in a place that distinguishes her from Superman and Batman: she's the rebel. She is the force outside the system that seeks to find a new, better way. In this book we will see how the system reacts to that rebellion and what happens to those in power who try to put Wonder Woman down.



HOW DO THE NEW ADVERSARIES INTRODUCED IN THIS SERIES POSE A THREAT TO THE AMAZONS?

The new villain we're introducing in *Wonder Woman* #1 is on par with Lex Luthor or The Joker. He has a plan to strike at the heart of our hero. How Wonder Woman responds, how she takes this incredible blow and keeps fighting, is the story of this book.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE RELAUNCHING THE *WONDER WOMAN* ONGOING SERIES?

At George Pérez's funeral, they played a video George had recorded before his death. He said his greatest accomplishment was doing something incredible and interesting with Wonder Woman. I remember watching that and feeling so intimidated, but also so challenged. Wonder Woman deserves thrilling, compelling stories that are as smart and tough as the people who love her. George is right, it's hard as hell to get her right...and Daniel and I are going to do it.

WHAT DOES ARTIST DANIEL SAMPERE BRING TO THE SERIES?

In one word: epic. He has that Jim Lee doing *Batman: Hush* energy to his art. It's the kind of pencils and inks that throw you into the story and make you stand up and applaud. With this comic, every issue aims to be an event and will have huge moments that will stick around for a while.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE SCENE FROM THE SERIES YOU CAN TEASE TO FANS?

We did something in a later issue where in the midst of a world in chaos, Wonder Woman takes some time to help a kid in need. I love that she's not only reacting to what's coming at her. She always has a moment for those in need.

DON'T MISS *WONDER WOMAN* #1, ON SALE IN SEPTEMBER!

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